

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, January 24, 1879, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Milton Hill. Friday, January 24, 1879. My darling May:

Here I am still and I don't know when I am to get away. Our case has not been opened yet and I am sick of the telephone and of everything else.

The Bell Telephone Company seems on the verge of bankruptcy and the gentlemen who have put in money into the Company believe that everything has been mismanaged and are now taking the control into their own hands to save their own credit and the credit of the company. I cannot explain everything to you by letter and shall therefore have to wait till I can see you. The condition of affairs has reached a crisis and the company finds itself without any money in its Treasury and about \$42,000 in debt. The gentlemen who have recently taken stock in the company are raising heaven and earth to avoid a calamity. An important meeting of Directors has been held. The Executive Committee has been abolished and other radical changes have been made — and I must say that apart from all personal feelings — I think the Directors are adopting the best course now open to them.

A meeting of the Stockholders is to be held to consider the advisability of dissolving the present Company and of forming a new Company with enlarged capital. I will explain everything to you when I return — for you — as 2 the largest stockholder — must make up your mind upon the subject — and vote one way or the other. I wish your father could be here to consult with these gentlemen — for evidently a crisis has arrived.

I wish that all connected with the Company could meet together — and come to a common understanding on all matters.

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I wish we had some other man to testify for us than this “expert.” I don't like the look of him. He seems to be a professional witness who will swear for any person who will pay him.

He does not impress one as a gentleman — and I find that his brother is the “expert” who is engaged on the other side! This looks bad — and I don't want to see any such men as this appearing as a witness on our behalf. I would rather see some scientific man of standing asked to testify to the infringements.. Some man whose reputation would be above suspicion — and whose testimony could not be bought.

I have come here tonight as the guest of Mr. Forbes, one of the new Directors — a wealthy man — of great influence and who has a reputation of thorough integrity.

I have come here to make his acquaintance and study him as well as I can — for I have been much struck with his appearance and manner. You know how much struck I was with the appearance of Mr. Morgan of London, your grandfather's friend. He seemed to have stamped upon his features the words “Integrity — Firmness — Good sense and Experience” — well I have never met a man who reminded me so strongly of Mr. Morgan's cast of head and inspired in me so much confidence as this Mr. Forbes. To be sure there is not the remotest likeness to Mr. Morgan but the same character seems to be expressed in his countenance. To be true I know absolutely nothing of him — but I judge a great deal from appearances. I like and dislike — I trust and distrust people — without the remotest reason very often. I have a sort of instinctive feeling — that aways me unconsciously and I was conscious of a sort of sigh of relief — when I found Mr. Forbes' head among those on the Board of Direction. It seems a well-balanced phrenological head and he is a man who looks you full in the face — and whose whole appearance inspires confidence.

Mr. Sanders strikes me as “a good fellow” — but I can't trust his judgement. He seems vacillating — and evidently does not possess much business ability.

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Mr. Bradley seems a much more solid sort of man than Sanders — and has the word “Integrity” very clearly expressed in his appearance — but he seems to me to be much too sanguine and rash to be well-balanced. He evidently has good judgement and considerable ability — but inspires me with a feeling of lack of experience.

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Mr. Blake has a thoroughly honest expression of countenance but does not seem a man of any particular ability as a Director. He seems lacking in power and firmness.

Mr. Watson I believe to be a man of great good judgement but of course has no experience as a Director. Your Uncle Eustis inspires me with a feeling of “weakness.” He seems to me thoroughly good and upright — but I cannot trust his judgement.

Taking my impressions of all the men gathered together to consider the condition of the Company — I think we have reason to be thankful that we have such a good set of men connected with the company. But the only man who impresses me as possessing marked ability is this Mr. Forbes. I have given you my thoughts and my impressions and we will keep them quietly in our minds and see how far these impressions are borne out by subsequent events. Of course darling I am writing to my little wife — and to no one else — for such personal remarks as those contained in this letter are only thoughts for myself and you. I wish I could get over instinctive feelings. Now there is Mr. who has been as good and kind to me as any man could possibly be — and who has done all he could to show his interest in me and my work — well — I like him — and like him very much — and yet there is an instinctive something in my heart — a sort of guilty feeling of distrust without cause. However, my paper has come to an end.

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With much love, Your loving, Alec.